

MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON Monday, 28 September 2020 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

PRESENT: HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR Councillor Sargeant (in the Chair).

COUNCILLORS: Malpas, Ansell, Ashraf, Aziz, Beardsworth, Birch, Bottwood, Cali, Duffy, G Eales, T Eales, Eldred, Flavell, Golby, Graystone, Hadland, Hallam, Haque, Hibbert, J Hill, Joyce, Kilbride, King, Lane, Larratt, B Markham, M Markham, Marriott, McCutcheon, Meredith, Nunn, Oldham, Parekh, Patel, Russell, Sargeant, Kilby-Shaw, Smith, Stone and Roberts

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

2. APOLOGIES.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Chunga, Davenport, Walker and Choudary.

3. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND PETITIONS

None.

4. REALIGNMENT OF THE REVENUE & BENEFITS SERVICE

Councillor Eldred presented the report which sought Council approval for the realignment of the Revenue and Benefits service which was necessary due to the demise of LGSS; this request was approved by Cabinet at a special meeting on 23rd September. It was proposed that a Lead Authority Model be adopted with the Lead Authority being Milton Keynes Council. There would be no change in the level of service provided and staff would not be TUPE transferred to Milton Keynes Council but would, in time, be transferred to West Northamptonshire Council. The most significant change would be that the Head of Revenue & Benefits would report to the Section 151 Officer at Milton Keynes Council.

Councillor Nunn seconded the report.

Councillor Stone thanked the Monitoring Officer for giving Members the opportunity to vote on the proposal and thanked the S151 Officer for his efforts in protecting staff. She noted that the Labour Group submitted a motion calling for a Northampton unitary authority which had cross-party support and further noted that Northampton had a larger population compared to Daventry and South Northants councils, would be providing and requiring around 80% of West Northamptonshire Council's budget. Councillor Stone felt that the report had been imposed upon the Council and commented that Members were being forced into making a rushed decision.

Councillor Beardsworth stated her disappointment that there were no assurances that staff would keep their jobs once transferred to West Northamptonshire Council. She felt that the report had been rushed through and implored the administration to fight harder for Northampton residents.

Councillor Birch stated that whilst she understood the reasoning behind the report, she questioned why it had happened in the way that it had and hoped that the Chief Executive and the administration would finalise the governance and agreements in order to protect staff and retain the culture of customer focus and efficiency.

Councillor Roberts expressed disappointment that the Council were being asked to make a decision so close to the deadline. She referred to paragraph 4.35 of the report and commented that there was not much in the way of guarantees or assurances for affected staff. Councillor Roberts further noted that whilst the realignment was due to the demise of LGSS, LGSS were referenced throughout the West Northamptonshire Council blueprint which she found concerning.

Councillor B Markham commented that his biggest concern related to staff who did a great job for some of the town's most vulnerable residents. He hoped that Councillors Eldred and Nunn would be able to assuage concerns raised by Members and echoed comments made by previous Members regarding how rushed the decision felt.

Councillor Meredith voiced concern around Revenue & Benefits staff being TUPE transferred to West Northamptonshire Council and the risk of redundancies. He disagreed with the decision to run the service from Milton Keynes Council.

Councillor Russell echoed concerns by fellow councillors and stated that the administration had 2 years to understand the issues around Revenue & Benefits and resolve them; now they had 4 days to find a solution.

Councillor Nunn confirmed that the move was a temporary one and that redundancies were not expected. The proposed recommendations were the best way to ensure a smooth continuation of the Revenue & Benefits Service.

Councillor Larratt stated that the Revenue & Benefits Service benefitted from the best staff and a manager at Milton Keynes Council with significant expertise in that area. He echoed Councillor Nunn's comments regarding a smooth continuation in service.

Councillor Eldred stated that the Council's priority was the staff and thanked the Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer for their efforts in protecting staff. He hoped that Members who would be sitting on the West Northamptonshire Council would continue to support staff as they had done as Borough Councillors.

At this point the Mayor called for the report's recommendations to be voted upon.

RESOLVED:

Full Council:

2.1. Noted the recommendations considered and approved by Cabinet on 23rd September 2020 (Appendix 1), reproduced in 3.1.1, 3.1.2 and 3.1.3 below and to agree to the following recommendations.

2.1.1 Specifically considered and approved Cabinet's recommendation outlined in 3.1.3 and thereby agreed:
to change the service delivery model for the Revenues and Benefits Service to a Lead Authority Model, as outlined in this Full Council report and

2.1.2 delegated to the Chief Executive the power to negotiate and finalise the necessary collaboration, governance and legal agreements between the partners, in Consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet member for Finance.

The meeting concluded at 7:03 pm